

A PUBLIC MEETING OF THE CAMBRIDGE CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

November 22, 2022 @ 5:30 p.m.
REMOTE ONLY – VIA ZOOM

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this meeting will be REMOTE ONLY via ZOOM.

The zoom link is: <https://cambridgema.zoom.us/j/83253118929>

Meeting ID: 832 5311 8929

One tap mobile

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Agenda Items – Tuesday, November 22, 2022

- I. Roll Call
- II. Introduction by Chair, Kathy Born
- III. Adoption of Meeting Minutes from meeting of November 8, 2022
- IV. Meeting Materials Submitted to the Committee to be placed on file
 - Communications from Committee Members
 - Communications from Council Members
 - Communications from the Public
 - Other Meeting Materials
- V. Committee Decision Making Proposal
 - Review draft, discuss, edit/finalize and action required
- VI. Committee Ground Rules Proposal
 - Review draft, discuss, edit/finalize and action required
- VII. Committee Values Statement Proposal
 - Review draft and discussion
- VIII. Community Engagement Working Document
 - Discuss community engagement strategies and provide feedback
- IX. Public Comment
 - Members of the public are invited to share their ideas or comments with the committee

Proposal: Decision Making

Overview

The committee will use a consensus based decision-making process, striving for agreement on decisions from all members. The committee's goal is to provide a space for thoughtful, deliberate, and inclusive dialogues around issues. Committee members agree to act fair, reasonable, and with integrity throughout deliberations to build trust within the committee and with the broader community of Cambridge.

Proposed Decision Making Rule

The committee will use the fist to five voting method. This voting method allows the degree of support for an issue to be easily determined for both the committee as a whole and individual members. The goal will be for all "4" and "5" votes on a motion, if there are "3" votes, the committee should ask those members to voice their specific concerns, but the decision can still move forward. The committee agrees to seek to resolve or compromise on all 0-2 votes.

- a. **5** - Whole support, I will champion this issue
- b. **4** - Positive support, I'm fine as it is
- c. **3** - More positive support than negative, minor issues to be resolved later (will not block consensus)
- d. **2** - Minimum support, minor issues to be resolved now
- e. **1** - Minimum support, major issues to be resolved now
- f. **0** - No way, opposed to issue

Where consensus on an issue cannot be met after extensive discussion in good faith, the committee will use a majority vote of present members to move decisions forward.

For the final charter recommendations at the end of the process, the committee will use a roll call vote and require a majority of the whole committee to pass the final report, recognizing unanimous support for the final proposal is the goal.

Expectations

- When a motion has been made, the facilitator will clearly repeat the motion and pause to allow any committee members to ask questions or comment before taking a vote.
- Committee members will raise their hand to show their vote on screen
- All decisions building up to the "final vote" will be tentative as the review process is an iterative process, committee members should feel comfortable to revisit previous topics, and alter earlier decisions.
- Allow for recording of minority views with a summary of reasons to include in report.
- Adoption of minutes and meeting materials (or other procedural matters) will continue to use roll call vote.
- Committee members or facilitators may call for straw polls during discussions to gauge a sense of the opinions of the committee on an issue or various proposals.
- Official record will note the gross number of votes in the 0-5 range, not individual votes by person

Proposal: Committee Ground Rules

Overview

The committee agrees to the following ground rules that all members will adhere to in deliberation and throughout the review process.

Members will:

1. Hear all voices; treat one another and our ideas with respect.
2. Take Space, Make Space. Make space for others to speak and feel comfortable taking up more space if you have not been.
3. Maintain an open mind, remain learning-focused and flexible to consider other opinions.
4. Assume good intentions of all committee members and the public.
5. Collaborate as we work together and continue to build trust.
6. Work efficiently to build a thoughtful and deliberate review process.
7. Acknowledge each individual has knowledge, strategies, and comments to contribute.
8. Respectfully question assumptions and take the opportunity when possible to ask: "Is there any data we might bring in to better inform our decision around this topic?"

To ensure committee members are prepared and able to fully contribute in each meeting the following will be implemented: each meeting and/or agenda item will have defined parameters and goal, there will be a designated leader for each agenda item, before a vote the issue will be restated clearly and members will have an opportunity to comment or ask questions.

Committee members should email cambridgecharterreview@cambridgema.gov if they cannot attend a meeting, need to leave early or have a schedule conflict.

All communications, whenever possible, should cc cambridgecharterreview@cambridgema.gov, for organizational purposes.

Committee members should feel comfortable discussing their charter review work with the public and members of the press as individual members of the committee, as the goal is to engage with as many stakeholders as possible.

Proposal: Values Statement

Purpose

The following is a proposed values statement that can work as a guide for the direction of the committee. This statement can be used to convey the priorities of this committee to the public and be a foundation for the committee to lean on in considering charter changes and making decisions.

Option 1: Statement Of Purpose

In order to honor and value all people and to create a future that no longer rests on the subjugation and devaluing of indigenous, black and other people of color, The Charter Review Committee will approach this task with an open mind, seek public input whenever possible, and strive to reach consensus as opposed to majority rule. With the acknowledgement that Cambridge was built on land stolen from Indigenous people and financed by brutal slavery, we strive to improve the existing Charter by addressing the inequities built into the power structures and legislature which govern this city. We will be conscious of and seek to remedy historical injustices and affirmatively advance everyone's capacity to thrive and participate in government and be attentive to the fullest possible range of civic concerns. We seek the input of community organizations, small business owners, institutions, and all members of our community, particularly people who have been historically marginalized to understand opportunities for equitable change in local governance.

We will treat everyone in the committee as equally entitled to make decisions, and everyone in our community as deserving of equal dignity, respect, tolerance, and humility. To ensure transparency of the committee's work, we will strive to make communications and deliberations available to the public. In summary, we have decided on the following values to guide our work in proposing a new Charter for the city of Cambridge: Community, Democracy, Civility and Social justice.

Option 2: Committee Values Statement

This Cambridge Charter Review Committee strives to work effectively and efficiently to produce a recommendation that empowers equitable, just, and democratic opportunities for all individuals of Cambridge.

Community

- We will work to engage a cross section of the Cambridge community, especially focusing on historically marginalized groups, to incorporate interests of all Cantabrigians in short, immediate, and future civic goals.
- We will strive to honor and value all people and aspire to create a future that recognizes and responds to historical subjugation.

Democracy

- We will seek input from local organizations, small business owners, and municipal leaders across the community to understand opportunities for equitable change in local governance.

- We will strive to make the committee's work, communications, and deliberations transparent and available to the public.

Civility

- We will hold all committee members with equal decision making capabilities and acknowledge the dignity and humanity of the entire community.
- We will engage each other and the public with respect, tolerance, humility, and open-mindedness throughout the process.

Social Justice

- We will strive to improve Cambridge's Charter by addressing the inequities built into the government foundation and power structures, acknowledging that Cambridge was built on land stolen from Indigenous people and built and financed by brutal slavery.
- We will be conscious of and seek to remedy historical injustices and affirmatively advance everyone's capacity to thrive and participate in government.

Values submitted by members:

Equity / Equitable / Fairness / Inclusion / enfranchisement

Effective

Inclusive / Enhance participation / accessibility

Efficient

Empathetic / Compassion / Ability to forgive and get beyond the past

Courageous

Honor

Human Centered

Community Oriented

Sustainable / Regenerative

Civility / Respect for others / Tolerance / Open-mindedness

Democracy

Humility

Justice / Social Justice

Innovation / Forward-focus / Willingness to try new concepts, methods, and non-traditional approaches or unconventional approaches.

Transparency

Balance

Selflessness

Proactive

Proposal: Community Engagement Work Plan

Overview

The following is a proposed initial framework for community engagement. Engaging the public will be a critical aspect of the Charter Review Committee's work. The committee will engage all members of the Cambridge community including - residents, business owners, community organizations, youth, municipal stakeholders and institutions. The committee will use diverse methods of outreach to engage people where they are, the spaces they are comfortable in and through methods most accessible.

Inform - Create objective and accessible information for the Cambridge community to understand the basics of a charter, the current structure of Cambridge's government, how city government affects their daily lives and the goal of the charter review committee. Provide information in multiple languages and across multiple platforms.

- *Informational Mailer* (mailed to residential addresses across Cambridge)
- *Fact sheets / Flyers* (similar to mailer, but can be disseminated via email, online platforms or posted physically in community centers or other public places)
- *Social media* (launch social accounts for the CRC, post about upcoming meetings, leverage existing city social media to reach a broader audience)
- *Public Committee Meetings* (continue to have open public meetings of the committee where the public live or via recording can watch the committee, review minutes and stay updated on deliberations)
- *Newsletter* (bi-weekly newsletter sent to a growing mailing list, online form for public to subscribe, updates on the committee deliberations and events)

Consult - Provide space for a broad cross section of the Cambridge community and stakeholders to provide input and comment on charter issues.

- *Public comment* (continue to have public comment section of each committee meeting, advertise timing and sign up)
- *Public meeting* (host at least 4 public forums - 3 in person, 1 virtual - providing space for public to comment on proposed topics, thoughtful dialogue amongst the public)
- *Attend community group events* (outreach to existing committee networks of community groups, schedule sessions for members to attend, inform and dialogue, examples: DSA, Children Voting Coalition)
- *Interactive Social Media* (pose questions to the public, initiate conversations, ask for direct feedback on committee deliberations)
- *Tabling at events* (farmers markets, cambridge city events, cultural events, etc)

Involve - Continuously work directly with the public to ensure issues and concerns are understood and addressed.

- *Survey* (once the committee has developed a targeted work plan of topics and issues it will consider, create a survey posing specific questions and scenarios to the public)
- *Workshops* (targeted around issue areas, dialogue between community members, possible outside facilitator)

Dear Members of the Charter Review Committee,

Regrettably, I cannot attend today's meeting, due to Covid.

I take the liberty of sending along some comments regarding today's agenda items in lieu of presenting them "in person."

1. I am generally fine with the "**ground rules**" and "**decision-making**" and "**community engagement**" statements and thank all who participated in the drafting and otherwise for all their hard work.

2. Statement of Purpose

Respectfully, I strongly object to the current statement both as to wording and to content.

a. Our purpose as a committee, as I understand it, is to review and make suggestions as to possible changes in the present City Charter. It is not, primarily (and as current statement suggests) to rectify past racial and other injustices, any more than it is to establish world peace. However worthy such goals, it is not the main task we have been assigned and have delegated authority to address.

b. Opening statement is also inconsistent with being open to "the fullest range of civic concerns," having indeed narrowed such concerns to a single issue (before we have had a chance to canvas such concerns on even a preliminary basis).

c. Opening statement is likely to alienate many in the wider community whom we claim to wish to engage.

d. Statement as worded takes for granted we already know and agree about what needs fixing and how to fix it; rather than presenting them as open questions for our due consideration over the coming months.

3. Values Statement

a. Statement as written is contradictory: we cannot honestly solicit the views of all members of the community and at the same time put our thumb on the scales in the interests (as we see it) of one special group or groups. Why should others participate if seems to them (as it might, however wrongly, given the present wording) that the "fix is in"?

b. Public outreach and consensus are great, and everyone has an equal right to his/her/their opinion, but not all opinions can be equally true (unless, of course, they are all equally "untrue"). Our job as I understand it is not just to let everyone have a say, but to accurately assess how well the current Charter is or isn't working to advance the city's legitimate goals and interests.

c. Too much stress on what should almost go without saying (namely that we treat one another respectfully and in hopes of learning something from the other and collectively). To belabor the point is to suggest the opposite.

d. Social justice statement is problematic for the reasons already discussed above: namely, that it "puts the cart before the horse." Either we already know what's (mainly) wrong and what to do about it (in which case we should write our report now and disband early) or it is (or will be read as) mere "virtue-signaling."

With apologies again for my absence, and regrets that I cannot participate more directly in your important deliberations.

Gratefully and respectfully yours,

Susan (Shell)
Charter Review Committee Member
11/21/22

In favor of at-large PR system

Allan Sadun <aesadun@alum.mit.edu>

Sun 11/6/2022 9:37 AM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear members of the Cambridge Charter Review Committee:

I was disappointed to read in the *Cambridge Day* that you are considering ward-based Councillors as a potential charter change. I believe this is a dead end and that there are many other changes much more deserving of your consideration.

The strength of our at-large proportional representation system is that it allows any community of interest to be represented if they are sufficiently motivated to vote together, no matter what that community's geographic distribution is. A district-based system could disenfranchise racial / linguistic minorities, religious minorities, sexual minorities, seniors, affordable housing tenants, or any other voters who are most passionate about voting according to any non-geographic criterion.

A district-based system would also require periodic redistricting fights, which are nearly always game-able and fraught. Look no further than the recent sectarian fights in Boston's redistricting process to see just how thorny it gets when politicians are in the business of picking their voters and deciding for us which communities of interest matter or don't matter. Any possible redistricting scheme is likely to further one inequity or another - for instance, in New York City, their redistricting process is set to massively overrepresent Staten Island.

Multi-member districts are a political science best practice - they work excellently in [Ireland](#), and there's a reason Portland, Oregon is voting on moving to a [multi-member STV PR system](#) in just a few days. Cambridge's own [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) and the [Fair Representation Act](#) currently in Congress suggest that US House elections move to a multi-member district system (read more [here](#)).

The simple matter is that multi-winner elections allow for fair representation and single-member districts do not.

I'm not saying our election system is perfect. The biggest thing I think may be worth exploring is whether elections could be moved to even years, in order to increase turnout and participation. Low-turnout municipal-only elections produce strong inequities.

And this is a nit, but I have found it difficult to explain our pseudorandom surplus transfer rules, and even though they don't statistically matter, I've found they seem to increase voter discomfort. A fractional system would mean we get to use [this cute MPR video](#) to explain things instead.

And I recognize the difficulty in running for election citywide in a big city, and I recognize the confusion in not knowing who to contact about issues. I urge you to find other ways to ameliorate those issues. For instance, in Somerville, there is a [City Hall Community Meetings](#) program which helps increase accountability and transparency on neighborhood-specific issues. It doesn't require a charter change, but maybe it's something our City Manager should look into.

The big picture is: we should recognize the value in our at-large, PR, STV system, and seek to keep it.

Thank you,
Allan Sadun

237 Elm St #1

P.S. I have written this letter on behalf of myself and no other individual or organization.

Electing city councillors by ward

Josiah Bonsey <josiahbonsey@gmail.com>

Mon 11/7/2022 1:37 PM

To: Cambridge Charter Review Committee <CharterReviewCommittee@Cambridgema.gov>

Dear members of the charter commission,

I understand you are at the beginning of your work. Even still, I would like to express my deep objection to the idea of a ward-based election system in Cambridge. It is an idea that sounds nice as a theoretical alternative to our current system. In practice, the immediate effect of this change would be to greatly exacerbate political division between neighbors. I see no obvious benefits to our community's political discourse.

It would also create the possibility that nearly half of residents in any individual neighborhood would go without any representation whatsoever on the council. With our current system of #1 votes and transfers, this is virtually impossible. Our city is likely to become increasingly inequitable in the future, a ward-based system would increase the risk of concentrating power in the hands of wealthier residents who are able to afford the greatest investments of time and money toward their preferred political causes.

If there is evidence Somerville, Boston, and other cities that use ward-based systems have better functioning councils than we do, or achieve better outcomes for residents than we do, then I'd like to see it, because I am skeptical this is true.

Whatever the deficiencies of our current election system are, Cambridge is one of the rare cities that gives every resident an opportunity to actually be represented by a candidate who received their vote. It's one of our local traditions that I am most proud of, as a born-and-raised Cantabridgian. I believe it's a true example of our political system living up to our community values. (How rare this is in American politics!)

Our at-large election system is something the charter commission should protect. Whatever its annoyances, it aligns with principles of diversity and inclusion. A ward-based system, I fear, will never produce a genuine representation of this city's residents. I believe that what it would cost us would far outweigh its benefits to us; and that we would regret it.

Thanks very much, and good luck.

Josiah Bonsey
354 Broadway #1



Robin Schanche Chen

@RSchanche

Mom seeking Votes for Kids, bc listening&being heard brings peace&understanding. Often found in libraries, museums, parks, at home.
kidscantvote.org

Joined April 2013 · 62 Followers

Not followed by anyone you're following

Hi, Max. Thanks for serving on Cambridge Charter Review Committee. I'd like to see under-18s empowered by our Charter to vote in local elections. Robin

Nov 1, 2022, 1:13 PM

You accepted the request